

THE FAMILY NOVEL AS  
A REFLECTION OF HISTORY:  
*BILLIARDS AT HALF PAST NINE* (H. BÖLL)  
AND *A LATE DIVORCE* (A. B. YEHOSHUA)

by

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Both *Billiards at Half Past Nine* (1959) by Heinrich Böll and *A Late Divorce* (1982) by A. B. Yehoshua are about and reflect the turbulent backgrounds and transitional states of individuals as part of their national history.<sup>1</sup> These novels, as literary expressions of committed authors, are about two people whose recent histories have been tragically connected—one as the persecutor and the other as the victim of the persecution. In both, the burden of ethical responsibility for the results and side effects of the historical events is a major thematic factor.

A brief, introductory plot summary of the novels might by a helpful background for the ensuing discussion. *Billiards at Half Past Nine* is the story of four generations in the Faehmel family extending from the beginning of the century, through the Nazi period to 1958. The story is told in the form of the recollections of different members of the family in one day in which they prepare for the birthday of Heinrich Faehmel, the head of the family. Heinrich's wife, Johanna, has been secluded in a sanatorium since the Nazi period, and their only surviving son, Robert, has become estranged from his father as a result of the former's evaluation of Germany's past and present. Robert secludes himself in a lonely ritual game of billiards and waits for the return from exile of his friend Schrella, with whom he shared a short resistance period against the Nazi regime. At the end of the day Johanna performs the act of revenge she has long hoped for against an anonymous embodiment of a Nazi figure, and Schrella decides to return to exile. At the birthday party Robert and his father acknowledge their tension about the past, centered around the rebuilding of an Abbey destroyed in the war. The boy, Hugo, a bellboy in the hotel where Robert plays his daily game of billiards, is adopted by

1. All citations are from Böll (1961) and Yehoshua (1985).

the family circle which includes Robert's own children, Joseph and Ruth.

In A. B. Yehoshua's novel, *Yehuda*, the father of the Kaminka family, returns to Israel from the United States for the Passover week. He is determined, finally, to get a divorce from Naomi, his wife, who is secluded in a sanatorium, after seemingly attempting to murder him. Yehuda intends to return to exile and marry Connie, who is pregnant and is going to present him with his fourth offspring, Moses. The baby Moses is ultimately brought to Israel and adopted by the family. Naomi's and Yehuda's two sons, Asa and Tsvi, as well as their daughter Yael, exhibit various ambivalent attitudes towards the divorce of their parents. When the divorce is attained after many obstacles, Yehuda's increasing ambiguity about leaving the country and his family delays his departure and finally results in his mental breakdown and murder by a patient in the Sanatorium where Naomi is secluded. The divorce proved to be too "late" and thus impossible.

Böll's novel reflects a state of crisis in German national identity in the aftermath of the death, destruction, political disintegration and ruin which was brought about by the Nazi regime. Yehoshua's novel emerges out of the Israeli crisis of national identity engendered in the meeting of Zionist ideals with Zionist realities. In *Billiards* guilt feelings toward the past shadow the present, creating doubts about responsibility for historical events. In *Divorce* the experience of historical responsibility is shaded by a sense of commitment toward the future. In both novels the author's presentation of this experience is accompanied by attempts to construct an understanding of it. *Billiards* is directed against the resurgent nationalism in Germany, whereas *Divorce* refers thematically to the existence of the State of Israel as a historical phenomenon compared to the traditional utopian expectations connected with the return to Zion.<sup>2</sup>

As Tobin (1978) has suggested, the modern family novel, in some aspects, is often an indicator of a period of upheaval and disjunction in society. In the modern family novel, the emphasis on paternal and filial continuity turns into a reemphasis on the generational conflict, as the family's "genealogical imperative" acts as a metaphor for historical problems. The Oedipus motif not only leaves the mythical heroic sphere but also leaves behind the incest motive and the guilt feelings aroused by it. In modern novels, the father-son relationship is frequently tied to the theme of the family in its link to history. The father figure emphasizes

2. A detailed bibliography on the author A. B. Yehoshua and his works may be found in Yerushalmi (1982).

the old accepted norms and conforming attitudes, while the son expresses a new and critical approach. Therefore, the generational cycles which contain in themselves a basic contradiction that time exposes rather than resolves, is central to these novels. The inherent contradiction between the repetitive cycle of generations and the inner conflict involved in challenging this repetition is deepened in times of dynamic historical events.

In these novels, time has a dominant function, both in the designation of their major themes and in the strategies of their composition. The historical dimension of time is relevant as a common past history and, consequently, the characters in the novels either follow or attempt to intervene in the inertia of the historical process. Time functions in *Billiards* and *Divorce* either as a connecting link between one generation and the other or as a cause for animosity between them. Critical consciousness, therefore, regarding historical times or an emphasis on the relevant of its absence, governs the logic and ironies of plot and characters in historically-bound modern family novels.

The theme of awareness and involvement in the historical process has a formative influence on *Billiards* and on *Divorce*. Plot is not guided by the fate of one character, but is constantly linked, dynamically and interpretatively, to the history of the individual in his or her family, within the wider context of the historical period. The depiction of characters emphasizes their roles in the historical setting, rather than their own individual personalities, which are not presented in much depth. Allegorical writing pervades: the family and its members embody historical processes.<sup>3</sup> However, in both novels—and especially in *Divorce*—the authors employ static and dynamic materials which, by their mimetic nature, break the allegoric code. Notwithstanding differences in critical assessment, there is relevance in the interpretative assumption that allegorical writing is dominant in the composition of both novels, and points to the crucial relationship between the family and historical

3. The term "allegory" as used here is based on Northrop Frye's (1950) view that "We have allegory when the events of a narrative obviously and continuously refer to another simultaneous structure of events or ideas, whether historical events, moral or philosophical ideas, or natural phenomena." Preminger (1974, p. 12). Barney (1979) draws a distinction between two types of allegory: "Allegories of love", often spatially or paradigmatically expressed between name and things having their reflection in one's relation to nature and to others; and "allegories of history", chronologically expressed between one discourse and another having their "counterpart . . . in the social reflection on history—remembering, recording, hoping" (p. 36). The two novels discussed here show aspects of the "allegory of history".

forces. In *Billiards*, an allegorical reading comments on Germany in the National Socialist and post-war period; and in *Divorce*, the allegory relates to Zionism as an event in the continuity of Jewish history. Israeli critics, commenting on this aspect of *Divorce*, share the view that the novel fluctuates between realistic and allegorical compositional elements, while emphasizing different points on the continuum. Sadan-Lubenstein (1981) observes a combination between the "realistic" and the "fantastic"; Shaked (1982) suggest that the novel offers a possible literary "paradigm" of Israeli society; and Barzel (1983) refers to its composition as a combination of the "naturalistic" and the "metaphysic."

Memory is central to the rhetoric of the novels in most of their formal manifestations: memory and its link to the present and the future is represented as an exemplary knowledge—which might otherwise fade into oblivion—to be preserved by the generations. The life-courses of different characteristics are set in a pattern of generational succession epitomizing memory of family history as an attitude-developing factor towards continuity or discontinuity in national history. The memories of the different generations prompt different responses, either a search for a meaningful activism or a passivity turned into conformism or deviant seclusion. In formal terms, the setting for both novels is composed in a brief time frame: the setting for *Billiards* is one day, including flashbacks over fifty-one years in the memory of three generations in the Faehmel family.<sup>4</sup> In *Divorce*, the time all told is nine days and includes the memories of two generations in the Kaminka family. Both novels employ the technique of an internal "memory monologue" with a time span of a few generations, as a way of relating to historical experience and reconstructing the understanding of it. In both novels, the various chapters are composed around the inner "memory monologue" of one of the characters. Thus both novels include Faulknerian aspects in their family mythology and form.

In *Billiards* and in *Divorce* the historical perspective is part of consciousness and actions of the characters representing the successive generations. The characters of the first generation, in general, conform to the national effort, but with the progression of events, they develop a distrustful attitude toward it; the second generation is skeptical and irresolute as to their commitment to the historical process; and the third is drawn toward melancholy and inertia.

In *Billiards*, Heinrich Faehmel, the head of the family, conforms and climbs to the top of the status-oriented bourgeois German society in

4. On time as a thematic and formal aspect of this novel, see Horst (1959); Poser (1962, pp. 232–53); Jesiorkowski (1968, pp. 128–53).

times of peace as well as in times of war. Johanna, his wife, attempts to demonstrate her attitude towards historical events through her antagonistic behavior directed against officials of various German regimes. In the Nazi period, she openly shows her allegiances by accompanying a transport of deported Jews. However, disillusioned by the recurrence of German adherence to authority and aggressiveness, Johanna withdraws disappointedly into herself. In her seclusion at the sanatorium, she waits until the "time is ripe" (p. 250) for her revenge. The second generation, Robert and his friend Schrella, rebel against conformity in the social and political spheres but are indecisive concerning the appropriate, meaningful action to take. The third generation, Joseph, his fiancée Marianne and sister Ruth, troubled and confused, disassociate themselves from their forefathers' deeds and are drawn toward death. Joseph's disassociation from the past and lack of purpose in the present is hinted to in various ways: in his retreat from the family's traditional architectural occupation; in his suicidal automobile drive toward the signpost marked "Death" and finally, in the youngster's visit to the excavation of the Roman Children's graves.

In *Divorce*, the first generation, Yehuda and Naomi Kaminka, are committed, although ambiguously, to the Zionist ethos. Yehuda, the father, attempts to break the bond of his marriage and change the course of his life by retreating from loyalty to the collective historical task of rebuilding Israel toward the private sphere of life in the diaspora. He is, as his son sees it, a "guilt-ridden man, torn between two worlds" (p. 273). Naomi, his wife, withdraws into a sanatorium and lives in her fantasies and wishful dreams which center on the bond with Yehuda and their shared life in the land of Israel. The second generation, Yael, Asa and Tsvi, are drawn into the conflict between their parents and are confused as to their role in the family schism. The grandchild, Gaddi, experiencing the family tensions, almost succumbs to his heart ailment.

Of course, the *differences* in the presentation of this generational succession in each work are as basic as the *similarities*. Neither work adheres to the strict defining principles, conflicting with realistic presentation and separable from concrete symbols of intrinsic significance. However, their composition overlaps into an allegorical structure, even under the guise of a realistic surface, such as that in *Divorce*. This allegorization points to an awareness of the historical dimension in the rhetoric of both novels and forms the focus of the following discussion of the compositional function of the characters, the leading motifs, and the underlying mythic patterns, as well as the *dénouement* of the two plots. But while the historical awareness is crucial for both novels, it implies different trends: in *Billiards* toward dehistoricization and in *Divorce* towards

an acceptance of the inevitability of involvement in the generational-historical process.

The characters in the novels are in a constant state of disequilibrium as a result of their efforts to relate to the different time dimensions. In *Billiards* the trend of characters is mainly toward discontinuity in time. They disengage themselves from the collective German past and enclose themselves in an individual, escapist and ritualistic life-style in the present. With some of them, this disengagement is connected to guilt feelings toward the historical past and a search for responsibility toward the future. In *Divorce* characterization emphasizes an inner struggle for identity in the process of historical continuity, and any attempts at a disengagement from historical continuity are indicated as destined to fail. The theme of an existence in a time continuum is central to all characters, tending in *Billiards* toward discontinuity and in *Divorce* toward an unavoidable continuity.

In *Billiards* each of the major characters relates to time differently. Johanna Faehmel is secluded in a sanatorium for sixteen years. She experiences her withdrawal to a place of enchantment in an underground castle in which she can forget herself in her subjective time. She disconnects herself from the present, not willing to conform to it, and lives only in her memories of the past.

Her experience of the past as an "eternal today" (p. 246) is evident when she encourages Heinrich, her husband, to "be merciful, put out that diary in your eyes and let the others make history" (p. 147). She cannot disconnect herself from this eternal past; it is the one and only reason for her attempt to return to the present: "I'm ready with death in my handbag to return to life" (p. 245). "The time is ripe" (p. 250), therefore, to use the gun hidden in her handbag for her revenge against everything the Nazis represent in past and present German historical existence.

Heinrich Faehmel shows a heightened awareness of time and relives in one day—September 6, 1958—his memories of fifty years. The difference between Heinrich's memories and his wife's is that his are mainly self-centered, while hers are more impersonal. He does not disconnect himself from the present, as Johanna does. He always attempts to manipulate time—to "play" it as he swims" over a sea of time" (p. 108) wishing to be sovereign and independent from the historical process. He persuades himself to condense past and future in a secure present which is also epitomized in his daily break fast at Caf  Kr ner, a ritual kept up by him for years.

Heinrich sees himself as a "soloist," playing and dancing through life as if "I held the future in the palm of my hand, and needed only to grasp

it. Time suddenly became a power, it was being neglected and expired unused . . ." (p. 103). Nevertheless, he succeeds in using it to further his career and social status. His effort of detachment from commitment and responsibility to the collective historical past is not guiltless, and he admits that "I don't have a pure heart, and I know exactly how bad the word is; I feel my self a stranger" (p. 158), and he therefore accepts his wife's act of revenge.

Robert, the son, also manipulates time, but in a calculated abstract way (being a statistician) and not playfully like his artistic father. He, too, maintains a ritual activity in his effort to subdue the pangs of responsibility toward time, by keeping up the daily billiard game where "Time (here) had no dimensions" (p. 52). It is his way of controlling time, although it proves futile. His memories of the past are reflectively tied to events of the war, the death of his wife and his part in Schrella's resistance group. He is bothered by the problem of his involvement and his inner questioning: "Robert, where are you, Robert, where were you, Robert, where have you been?" (p. 272). The haunting memories of the past nurture an expectation for commitment to an active participation in the shaping of the future.

The generational dispute over the destruction and reconstruction of the Abbey and the character of Schrella are the main compositional factors, expressing disappointment with involvement in the historical process and the futility of human beings seeking themselves in action. Schrella is the character who personifies various possible reactions to historical events: during the fascist period, he was the leader of a resistance group; he reacted to the regime by emigrating from his homeland; in exile, he retreated into an inner migration through intellectual seclusion in his linguistic research; he returns to his homeland only to be disappointed again by post-war Germany; he rejects a quasi-religious offer to be adopted by the Faehmel family and, resigned to passivity toward historical events, leaves his homeland again. Schrella, the "shepherd," is thus the one whose different life experiences are allegorically related to the problem of the individual's place in history. His thematic centrality is emphasized by stressing the element of memory in others' recollections of him and by Robert's constant hope that Schrella will arrive with the right answer to the problem of active involvement in history. But Robert is left disappointed. Schrella's journey ends with an espousal of the futility of involvement: "Shepherd my lambs, Robert—but they only breed wolves" (p. 274).

In *Divorce*, too, the historical process is significant and central in the depiction of characters. The father, Yehuda, leaves Israel for America, settles there and starts another family. He returns to get a divorce from

Naomi hoping, finally, to dissolve his ties with his wife and Israel. Yehuda's attempt to ignore his bond to the land is signified by his efforts to get the divorce and sell the family apartment, thereby allegorically ridding himself of his share in the collective national fate. But in his effort to ignore the historical attempt to unite the people with the Land of Israel and his withdrawal from commitment to Zionism, the land the ideology still maintain levels of meaning pointing to his ambivalent ties. Yehuda's disappointment is the result of the clash between the restoration of Zion, as an ideal, and the pangs of its realization in the historical process:

We who saw this country being born though we could always bend it to our will always correct it if it went off course yet here it was out of control full of strange mutations different people odd permutations new sources of unexpected energy. The clear lines have been hopelessly smudged. If only it could at least be a homeland when will it settle down to be one (p. 313).

But after having his wish for divorce granted, Yehuda is unable to leave his wife and country, and, taking upon himself a feminine, earthly disguise (putting on Naomi's clothes) he symbolically fulfills the historical destiny of merging the returned exiled people with the homeland. He steps out of contemporaneity, he loses his watch and ignores the time of his flight back to the diaspora. His inability to leave the country is allegorized as an almost compulsory adherence to the continuity of Jewish history.

Naomi is depicted as an earthly mother figure, barefoot, in a long white cotton dress. In the sanatorium she works in the garden and feels a strong attachment to trees, plants, animals and the scenery around her. In some of her hallucinations, she fantasizes about women coming out of the earth and dancing between the trees. She is unable to detach herself from her husband, Yehuda, and visualizes him, too, as tied to the earth (pp. 286, 288, 291). The link between Naomi (the land of Israel) and Yehuda (the people) confers the meaning of a continuous covenant. In the characterization of Yehuda and Naomi the text dramatizes an archetypal duality between masculine (god, people) and feminine (land) elements. The tension between the more "spiritual" father figure and the more "earthly" sensuous mother figure has to be resolved. The people, its heritage and the land have to stay wedded: a divorce between them is not feasible. Only the affirmation and fusion of both in their reunion might overcome the duality of conflicting criteria toward Jewish history and approach the utopian dimension of the hypothetically possible.

Asa, the eldest son, as a historian, consciously reflects upon the inevitability of the historical process and its divergency in time, and he is



concerned with the possibility of altering its course through human effort. He holds, but is also skeptical toward, the belief that history comprehends an order of antecedent cause and a consequent effort moving purposefully toward a goal. In his academic activity he is obsessed with the solution of the relevant "secret code" (p. 156) concerning the meaning of the historical process. He wonders whether it is possible to halt or divert the inertia of historical, successive change in time and, by a deliberate human effort, to restrain, speed up or alter its course (pp. 127-28). Two historical situations illustrate this problem for him. The first is Napoleon, who retreated from Acre understanding that by his aggressive siege he had overreached the limits of interference in the flow of historical events (p. 139). The other illustration of the historical secret code is the situation in Rhodesia where the settlers, through their stubborn efforts to intermingle with the natives, entrapped themselves. For him, both events reflect the "secret code" at work in the historical riddle of Zionism as a breakthrough in Jewish history. Moreover, the outcome of Napoleon's retreat and the Rhodesians' settlement makes him skeptical toward the chances of Zionism's success.

Asa's positive attitude toward the breakdown of his parents' marriage, and even his active interference in order to hasten the process of the divorce between his parents, functions in the allegorical sphere as an understanding of history. Asa sees the relation of his father to his mother as "a trap," and he immediately associates it with the historical process as "a historical trap" (p. 145). The marriage and union between the Jewish people (father) and the Jewish land (mother) might be, according to his "code," an act of intervention in historical inertia, thus exposing itself to failure. He is aware that the process of marriage and divorce is an inner need for both the parties involved, but he tends to believe that the separation has to be realized (pp. 149-50). He himself is torn between groping for abstract cognitive solutions, writing a thesis on a model for "the possibility of shortening historical processes" (p. 125) and living in fear of losing himself in time while still longing for the earthly Jerusalem (p. 145). Asa searches for meaningful subjective time, emptied of collective historical meaning, hoping that an individual time dimension might save him from being trampled (p. 136) or lost (p. 137), as "Time can never stop flowing but sometimes there is an air lock in the middle of it" (p. 151).

Since Asa is tormented by what he thinks and feels, he avoids fatherhood and thus withdraws from the responsibility of historical generational succession, yet he seems to keep in touch with sensual reality through an outburst of deviant sexual contact.

Tsvi, the younger son, is characterized primarily through his homosexuality, which is depicted as connected to the tension and ambivalence between the femininity and masculinity within his nature. In Tsvi's characterization, the allegorical aspect prevails; the problematic national identity between the masculine and feminine still does not recognize itself as either a unifying entity or a continuum in time.

Yael encloses herself in the circle of immediate individual, subjective time (p. 232). Her involvement in the family conflict is passive, and it is only in the personal emotive sphere that she demonstrates empathy for others, as well as great warmth and generosity. Unlike Asa, Yael does not experience the central father-mother conflict in the reflective sphere, nor does she respond in a rebellious, passionate manner like Tsvi. Her attitude toward the dispute is reluctant and noncommittal. Yehuda reproaches Yael for her passive reaction (p. 325), and he even accuses her of self-destructive behavior (pp. 259-61). Naomi, too, considers Yael to be meek and spiritless (p. 245). Yael herself, harboring guilt feelings about her passivity, takes upon herself the role of family historian (p. 235). She leaves the thinking to others, "but you leave the remembering to me" (p. 235). In this activity of recording events in time, her subjectivity causes her to forget one day, the day of *Sabbāt*. Her repression of the memory of this day is an expression of her ambivalence toward destructive energy. She recognizes that this memory slip is meaningful because this was the day when the family searched for a murderer, defended by Yael's lawyer-husband, who is later found not to be a murderer. The pursuit of the "murderer," on the one hand, and Yael's memory slip, on the other, point toward the problem of intervention in the historical process; Yael retreats into the subjective recording of events as the only historically meaningful act.

## II

There are three leading motifs in both novels: madness, murder and adoption. All three of them function as allegorical concepts of action that confer meaning on the theme of the individual's relation to history. The emphasis on this overriding function of the motifs is common to both novels, but their differential meanings are tied to each novel's thematically variant attitude toward history.

The meaning of madness in the novels is tied to the problem of the definition of sanity. The understanding of madness is not in the psychological or medical dimension; rather, it must be sought in the character's attitude toward the historical process. In *Billiards* and *Divorce*, chaos or turmoil in the historical progression is the "madness" from which individual neurosis is an escape.

In the plots of both novels, the motif of madness serves an important function. In *Billiards* egocentricity is the way of the father, Heinrich Faehmel, as well as of the son, Robert. Both retreat from historical events into meaningless rituals, which peak by the seclusion of the mother, Johanna, in a sanatorium.

The motif of madness is tied to history in *Divorce*, as in *Billiards*. It is not predominantly an individual psychological situation, but an expression of a deep collective-historical fear and concern regarding the potential failure of Zionism as an integral part of Jewish history. The mother, Naomi, is considered insane, and finally the father, Yehuda, digresses into madness. All other members of the family are aware of themselves as existing at the limits of normality, pointing to neurosis in historical terms. Asa's role as husband and potential father is dubious. As such, it reflects his ambivalence toward generational continuation, which is the locus of his intellectual struggle with the problem of Zionism as an integral part of continuity in Jewish history. He has fits of self-aggression (p. 149-53) and is afraid of being afflicted by a genetically transmitted madness: "genetic insanity awaits you, Asa" (p. 167). Tsvi, torn between the mother and father figures, is afraid of losing his mind (p. 229), and the apparently well-adjusted Yael also has known a state of nervous breakdown (p. 245). Even those with no blood relationship to the family, but who come in contact with them, seem to develop signs of intense inner turmoil: Yael's husband, Israel Kedmi, who in many ways symbolically represents daily existence in Israel, feels he is sometimes on the verge of existential fear (p. 61), and his apparent sanity is doubted by Yael (p. 241). Dinah, Asa's wife, falls into situations of disorientation with reality, and Calderon, Tsvi's friend, is sometimes seen by his own wife as being insane (p. 179) and is seeking help from a psychiatrist. Connie, the potential second wife of Yehuda, is alert but also considered somewhat "odd" and a "sleepwalker" (p. 247).

These dilemmas result from the above characters' conflicting attitudes toward the masculine "father" element and the "mother" as the metaphorical Land of Israel, which Yehuda describes as a "small maddening land" (p. 300). As a result, they are manipulated into different escapist behavioral patterns. Asa retreats into sexual impotence, Tsvi rebels through homosexuality, and Yael, the most well-adjusted of them all, suffers from passivity.

One aspect of madness which I will discuss later, but which should be mentioned here, is the perspective of and reaction to historical reality in its relation to linguistic-imaginative constructs. In both novels, the insane mothers, Johanna as well as Naomi, articulate their common experience of madness through symbolism that is tied to collective consciousness.

In their characterization, the use of the mythical, legendary and Biblical expressions is a way of breaking the denotative description of reality and thus pointing to another connotatively different dimension. This additional dimension involves comparison and evaluation of happenings in different historical times in which madness, as a deviant attitude, throws a critical light on what is normatively accepted. Naomi's madness is doubted by members of her family, like Asa and Tsvi. Tsvi defines her madness as "like moving in two parallel tracks, both pretending to be crazy and getting crazier all the time" (p. 226). This view of madness, as being a dubious and ambiguous reaction to historical reality, is expressed by different characters in both novels.

The motif of brutal aggressiveness, exploitation, war and murder in *Billiards* is the factor motivating the plot, and it is developed in the *dénouement* with Johanna's act of revenge against those responsible for it. The motif of activism is also connected to the tension built up in the plot concerning the return of Schrella, who is expected, on the reflective level, to solve the dilemma of the "shepherd," a leader who induces others to murder as a justifiable reaction to historically oppressive events. In *Divorce*, too, most characters are connected with the motif of murder and madness, which represents two aspects of Israel's problematic existence: aggressiveness and dissolution of commitment. These parallel responses, one involving a mistaken and ambiguous relationship to murder and the other a futile attempt to break an irrational but irreversible bond, reflect the concerns of Israel Kedmi in dealing with law suits of murder and divorce. These concerns are also represented in Naomi's aggressive yet futile attempt to murder Yehuda. With the murder of Yehuda, Naomi was intending "to cut you loose from your constipated fear, from you self-involved, self-dictating mission to the world" (pp. 291–291). The connection between the motifs of madness and murder is finally evident in Yehuda's murder at the hands of a lunatic in the asylum; it is this senseless act which makes his stay in Israel final and irreversible.

Another peripheral motif tied to history in both novels is the motif of adoption. In *Billiards*, Marianne, the child of a Nazi, is adopted after the war. Schrella rejects adoption by the Faehmel family, and the boy Hugo is adopted by Robert Faehmel. Marianne ignores the biological family ties: "No, I can't feel it in my blood" (p. 210), she says, preferring her adopted parents to her own mother, who, with the capitulation of the Nazi regime, had wanted her to be part of the family's common act of suicide. Schrella does not want to become a father, for "the feeling in the blood is false" (p. 275), and Robert adopts Hugo, "our lamb" (p. 283),

as a religious act connoting disengagement from the continuum of German history. In *Billiards*, therefore the motif of adoption refers to an act of moral, historical choice as opposed to a process of biological predestination.

The allegorical meaning is different for the motif of adoption in *Divorce*. In *Divorce*, the baby Moses, abandoned by his mother in Israel, is considered for adoption by the Kedmi family; his adoption is also suggested by Yael's husband for the childless couple Asa and Dinah. This possible adoption of Moses, alluding to the Biblical figure of the Covenant and the return to the Land of Israel, hints at the historical future of the family as a hopeful prospect for a continuation of national history.

### III

Both novels depict the different life histories over three generations, encapsulated in several reflective streams, through the manipulation of point of view and of time structure. through repetition and juxtaposition of differences, there evolves patterns of individual variations. This structure lends itself to the description of inner subjectivity, but this aspect is balanced by other compositional factors which employ the description and evaluation of the collective historical memory and awareness. The depiction of the inner individual visualization as a selective and interpretative process emphasizes the individual time-dimension and experience of time. But when based as a communal "quasi-archetypal" level of associations, the evaluation of present patterns together with the memory of the past involves the application of a collective dimension to time.<sup>5</sup> This collective historical and ethical dimension is expressed by authorial intervention through the relating of historical events; but it is primarily expressed through the use of biblical references and other literary and mythical allusions which function as a "quasi-archetypal" element in each of the novels.

The quasi-archetypal elements links the work to a cultural order and to shared ethical attitudes. This element in the narrative structure presupposes a commonality of consciousness and a common moral attitude toward basic issues. The almost archetypal elements—mainly those of

5. On the "quasi-archetypal" aspects in the novel functioning as an element tying the individual to the collective, see Kretschmer (1977, pp. 191–215). Kretschmer indicates that the "quasi-archetypal" communal layer is part of the consciousness of those characters who are bothered by their commitment to the collective historical fate (Robert, Schrella and others) and are missing in the characterization of others who are enclosed in their pragmatic egocentric approach (Nettlinger).

"buffaloes," "lambs" and "shepherds" in *Billiards* and the Exodus story in *Divorce*, as well as other biblical and literary-legendary allusions—build up a temporal dimension to which the present can be compared and thus be freed from limited identification with a specific historical period. The quasi-archetypal elements lose their abstract ahistoric face and function as touchstones for temporal existence in its historical dimension.

In *Billiards*, "buffaloes" represent a life style based on raw power, and "lambs" represent the victims. These symbols are based on conventions culturally accepted and shared by the figures in the novel as well as by the reader.<sup>6</sup> Historical components are added to this religious and moral framework through the critical approach indicated by the ineffectiveness of the "lambs" and the problematic leadership of their "shepherds." The problematic tension between the aggressive nature of political activism and the non-violent aspect of compassion expressed by the inner tensions in and between the archetypal elements, suggests an inclination to withdraw into the relatively general religious-ethical sphere. Ultimately, the tension creates a somewhat noncommittal attitude toward resistance to a historical phenomenon like fascism.

The symbolic pattern in *Billiards* is based on the tension between the "lambs" and the "buffalo sacrament." The "shepherd," as a lamb's guide, functions as the main link between the religious and historical allegorical meaning connoted by these symbols. The "lamb" and symbols associated with it are based on the New Testament (John 13:6, 13:8, 14:1). The "lamb" as a symbol of innocence and helplessness in the novel is attributed to those figures who are the victims of the Nazi regime (Edith, Ferdi, Hugo, Schrella and Marianne). The "buffalo," as a symbol of blind, raw power, is connected to the religious element of the "Buffalo Sacrament," its meaning reversed here as having a destructive power. Historically, the buffalo is connected in the novel with Hindenburg and with the conventional German national characteristics of order, power and honor, as well as with the ideology of a "*Blut und Boden*" atmosphere: "I've seen them and heard them bearing his name before them, dumb as earth, deaf as a tree, and seeing to order, honor and loyalty, iron and steel money and a needy, suffering agriculture . . . (p. 143).

The characters connected with the buffalo imagery are ex-Nazis like Nettlinger or Vocano, who eat from the Sacrament, conform to the political regime in power at the time, and who turn either into Nazis, as

6. On the different sources of Böll's symbols discussed here, see mainly Haase (1964, pp. 219–26); Durzak (1979, p. 67–68); Hadomi (1984).

do Johanna's brothers and Ferdi's sisters, or into supposedly democrats, as does Nettlinger after the war.

The two episodes which primarily depict the historical aspect of the symbolic pattern are the meetings between Nettlinger and Schrella (Chapter 7) and Schrella and Robert (Chapter 12). The first meeting is between the "buffalo," Nettlinger, the former devoted Nazi who, in the sixties, has turned into a devoted democrat, and Schrella, a disillusioned former anti-Nazi resistance group leader who, returning from exile, now finds that in the new Germany time brings only reconciliation (p. 273). The second meeting is between Schrella and Robert Faehmel. In this scene, "shepherding" is the main topic. They remember friends who were once politically active against the Nazis and have now become self-centered, non-political and concerned only with "something of themselves" (p. 278). Aggressive interference in the historical process is problematic and viewed as ineffective. Schrella sees himself as a "perfectly unpolitical person" (p. 274), and after the discussion between the two friends, Robert adopts Hugo the "Holy Lamb," which emphasizes his turning to the religious sphere. Both respond to their disillusionment concerning the individual's ability to influence history.

In *Divorce* the story of the deliverance from Egypt serves as a mythical referent to illuminate a cognitive bridging between the historic boundaries associated with the Zionist idea and the historic event of deliverance from the diaspora into the land of Zion. The Exodus expresses the peculiar bond between God, his people and his land.<sup>7</sup> In this light, the modern Exodus to Israel is suggested as a possible historical solution. Asa, the character who stresses the cognitive aspects, comments on the issue of an overall disposition common to the family members—"And what was the collective consciousness of the four of us, did it add up to a single whole?" (p. 136). The biblical story of Moses, leading his people for forty years through the wilderness, the Sinai covenant, and finally the entry into the "Promised Land," has various interpretations in Jewish traditional writings and is here depicted as the "collective consciousness" of all the characters. As in Jewish tradition, it is an expression of a willingness, but also an unwillingness, to participate in the act of deliverance. The impetus of the Exodus story does not represent a straight continuity of return, restoration and renewal. The story includes interruptions, revolts and backsliding. Thus the tale of the Exodus contains an ambivalent, although committed, attitude to the ingathering of exiles in Zion. It is an archetypal source for a continuous generational

7. On the meaning of Exodus as a historic phenomenon, see Walzer (1984).

awareness of bearing the national history of the collectivity on one's shoulders.

The saying from the Passover *haggadah*, "In every generation let each one look upon himself as if he came forth out of Egypt" stresses the individual and generational commitment to be free for exile and to return to Zion. Modern Zionism embodies a historical face, a renewed attempt at the secular realization of this idea, setting it within the limits of historical reality and the complexities of this world. The tension between the mythical covenant pointing to the irreversible connection between the people and the Land of Israel and its implementation in historical time is the center of the narrative presentation in *Divorce*. Aspects of the narrative which allegorically designate the cluster of concepts related to Passover are: the irreversible covenant between the land the Jewish people; aspects of the "Moses" figure wandering forty years in the desert; and various Passover celebrations interwoven in the plot.

The centrality of the Exodus motif is hinted at already in the first chapter of the book, when Gaddi recalls one school lesson: the lesson concerning Passover (pp. 12, 15). The marriage between Naomi and Yehuda lasted forty years (p. 33), and the most insane person in the sanatorium is forty years old (p. 285). Naomi sees her alliance with Yehuda as eternal, a suggestion of a renewed love with the part of her personality that "has come from the desert" (p. 290). Yehuda sees the promise of eternal loyalty only as a parable for the direction of longing of the people of Israel and for the land, and he is antagonistic toward "demanding the impossible from me to keep a promise meant only as a metaphor, as a landmark of longing" (p. 320). When his desire for his ideal loved one is blemished by complexities and falls short of perfection he wonders, "Homeland, can you be a homeland?" (p. 319, 327, 345, 348) and strives for the annulment of the bond. But divorce is not feasible, the covenant is eternal, and return to the desert is impossible (p. 285). The alliance between the people of Israel and its land is unbreakable, and what is a biblical promise of eternal wedlock has to be kept, even if reality is different from the dream. He cannot leave his love: "history doesn't close and you can't avoid the eternal oath," although "it mustn't be said, must not even be said, but the State of Israel is an episode. Or will history have mercy?" (p. 319).

The name Moses is applied to two figures in the novel. Musa (a Jew or an Arab, p. 354) is the stammering giant who gives the final death stroke to Yehuda, preventing him from abandoning Israel (p. 354). This



episode alludes in some analogical, reversed aspects to the biblical story of Moses awakening to his personal commitment toward his fellow Jew and to being aroused to murder as a reaction to injustice, be it committed by a Hebrew or an Egyptian.

The other Moses is Yehuda's baby son, who was brought by his mother, Connie, from the United States to Israel, dressed in ritual red clothing and stammering (p. 150).<sup>8</sup> Here again, there are analogies to the biblical Moses: abandoned by his mother (Connie—the biblical Jochebed); watched and taken care of by his sister (Yael—the biblical Miriam); and, finally, probably adopted by Pharaoh's daughter (Asa's wife Dinah?). The red clothes of Moses the baby also carry connotations of the biblical Moses, as well as of a messianic figure in general. Thus the Moses figures in the novel contain within themselves a strong feeling of commitment, connecting the hope of Zionism with the figure of Moses and the myth of recurrence.

The historical focus, as expressing the plot around which the narrative revolves in each novel, obviously contains thematic and formal differences between the two which also express themselves in the conflict and its *dénouement*.<sup>9</sup> In *Billiards*, the theme of the plot is symbolically centered on the destruction and reconstruction of Saint Anthony's Abbey. The Abbey is planned and constructed by the architect, father Heinrich Faehmel, and secretly destroyed by the son, the statistician Robert Faehmel. When Joseph Faehmel, the grandchild, discovers these circumstances, he withdraws from participating in the reconstruction, saying, "demolish or build, I don't know yet" (p. 263).

The father avoids confrontation with the moral ramifications of national socialism and the war by devoting himself to the reconstruction of religious monuments; the son, involved in the problem of the moral

8. The color red is associated in the Bible with the figure of the redeemer and the day of vengeance and redemption (Isaiah 63:1-5) as well as being associated with the "beloved" (Solomon's Song 5:10). In later Jewish traditional writings (*B'Reishit Raba*) allusions of redemption are connected with it. In *Sefer Haiashar*, the story of Moses' youth in the house of Pharaoh, includes the description of his red-purple garments.

9. See Koselleck (1973, pp. 211-22). In this article, Koselleck points to different time structures devoid of a theological sense of history on which the modern novel is based. He mentions that in some novels, Godly Providence is replaced, not by human planning, but by a vast time perspective over many generations, which allows for an awareness of relevant historical interrelation. The approach in other novels reflects the skepticism as to the realization of aspects based on theological eschatology as well as on Historical Utopianism. We might consider *Divorce* as close to the first sense of historical *tempus* and *Billiards* to the second.

meaning of historic events, does not accept the premises that monuments can either substitute for the loss of life of the fascist regime's innocent victims or diminish one's responsibility for the past and present. The grandson backs away from the dilemma into passivity, unable to function in a world devoted to frantic materialistic values and despairing of any type of effective action. Thus, the theme of the construction and destruction of the Abbey is the center of the generational conflict, and it symbolizes the different attitudes toward history.

The thematic focus in *Divorce* is centered around the marriage and divorce element which organizes the development of the plot. The father (representing the Jewish people and spiritual heritage) and the mother (representing the earth element and the land of Israel) maintain an ambivalent tension. The second generation reacts to this with different manifestations of ambiguity and, as a result, shapes the attitude of passivity in the third generation.

The *dénouement* of the plot in both novels is directly related to those central symbolic situations and is depicted in festive family gatherings: the birthday part in *Billiards* and the Passover meal in *Divorce*. At the grandfather's birthday party in *Billiards*, all the generations (except the mother), gather, and Heinrich offers a piece of cake to his son Robert, made in the form of the Abbey. This conciliatory gesture by the father suggest his knowledge and resigned acceptance of conflicting attitudes toward history and the roles the family members play in it. The sugar-coated expression of a real, unavoidable generational conflict is one fact among several which structure the meaning of the *dénouement* as a disengagement from an active moral commitment to history. Other elements are: Johanna's shooting as an act of revenge against fascism which does not result in an effective consequent; Robert's professional involvement in a possible project of rearming Germany—project "5X" (pp. 269–70); and the grandson Joseph's retreat from any involvement in these conflicts. Thus, the novel metaphorically records successive definitions of attitudes toward history as the characters of different generations act out first one concept, then another in their efforts to give their lives transcending value; but, ironically, they end up detached from involvement in political activism.

The family gathering at the birthday party does not affirm any active attitude toward history, but rather hints at a retreat into the religious sphere. The quasi-holy family meal suggests a movement away from historical involvement. The only activity performed is the adoption of

the "Holy Lamb", the boy Hugo, which again stresses the humanistic religious element and places the goal outside of history.<sup>10</sup>

The thematic focus of *Divorce* centers on marriage/divorce as the expression of a national situation. Here also, the *dénouement* includes a generational gathering at the family Passover meal. This gathering is incomplete, the mother being absent, and does not point toward a single directed solution. The divorce, whose completion is ironically juxtaposed with the traditional allegorical meaning of the Passover celebration, will not be fulfilled. The *seder* meal, as the traditional ritual meal of Passover, is repeatedly interwoven into the plot of the novel. This meal centers around the theme of personal and generational commitment to return to Zion. In the novel, the *seder* is described in five versions, each of them hinting ironically at the gap between the mythical-biblical and the historical, between the spiritual element and its concrete implementation in reality. The traditional generational harmony around the *seder* table is broken; and the ritual attributes symbolically connected with Exodus are deleted. This is true for the *seder* in the kindergarten, in the house of Dinah's parents, in the shattered family atmosphere of Calderon's home, in the mad atmosphere of the *seder* in the sanatorium, and in the tentative situation of the Passover meal in the restaurant, substituting for a real family gathering at Yael's home. The traditional family gathering of Passover is loaded with biblical meaning for the eternal bond between the people and the land of Israel. Here this is both ambiguously negated and reaffirmed, not as a divinely guided journey to a promised land but rather as an Exodus on a human scale.

A family gathering and a ritualistic meal, anticipated and performed in the diachronic plot development of both novels, echoes different ironic meanings. In *Billiards* the generational gathering in honor of the head of the family neither indicates an allegorical reconciliation between generations nor does it offer a meaningful answer to the historical problem of the Nazi German past or any hope for a different political future; rather, the gathering dramatizes an overall moral-religious frame. In *Divorce* the anticipated family gathering, at the traditional *seder* meal, by the mere fact of its repetitious, periodic nature, hints at the relevance of the family succession as a link in historical progression. The

10. "Religious" in Böll's sense: that is, not as adherence to the institutional official church, but as a humanistic-religious lifestyle and relationship to "the other". See Grothmann (1971, pp. 191–207) and Balzer (1975, pp. 1–29).

central meaning of the *seder* as a family ritual symbolizing the Exodus/Homeland motif as a recurrent individual and generational choice, reaffirms the impact of the Exodus as a great collective experience epitomizing the becoming of a people out of a community of faith. But the mythical pattern is a framework which both gives renewed relevance to the fact of history and symbolically allows it to function as a dwarfed version of the mythical bond.

An additional aspect contributing to the open-ended *dénouement* is the description of the two young children, hinting at the possible Israeli future. Gaddi overcomes his heart ailment, and his characteristic attributes of sensitivity and common sense refer to what is possible in the Israeli future. The baby Moses figure, with his biblical connotations, the messianic attributes associated with his red clothes, and his return for adoption in Israel, echoes hope. Despite the fact that the covenant is seen in historical terms as a constant struggle, Israel will continue to exist in this land, although the myth of the return to Zion is postponed, elaborated, heightened, and ultimately transferred to the utopian sphere.

In *Billiards*, humanity despairs over the inefficiency of action, with history appearing unresponsive to the will of its victims, although the end of the novel does not embody real defeatism; it rather hints at an accommodation to defeat. In *Divorce*, acceptance of present Israeli historical reality is placed in a larger time context, and a view of the individual's revolt against the dynamics of history is presented as an effort to attain historical perspective. *Billiards* negates the possibility that the individual man can redeem himself in historical involvement, since he does not have complete control over his destiny and therefore must bear the burden of history. The novel ends with an ethical-religious credo that suggests the possibility of immersion in reality. This credo, which also emanates from Böll's other writings, could be the only source of man's redemption in historical terms. In *Divorce*, the family gathering also has ironic undertones; but Gaddi's recovery, baby Moses' arrival and adoption in Israel, as well as Yael's efforts to record the family history all hint at an aspiration for human awareness and endeavor in the historical domain, and affirm the commitment to historic succession (p. 335).

The homecoming motif in *Billiards* centers on Schrella, who, pessimistic about the possibility of any meaningful change in Germany's post-war period, chooses to return from exile from his homeland and to embrace academic activity and religious faith. In *Divorce* the home-

coming motif centers around the father figure who tries to dissolve his historical ties with the land. But this attempt proves, as the result of both interior obstacles (madness) and exterior ones (murder), to be an impossible revolt against the historical process. The central motif of building/destroying in *Billiards*, symbolic of Germany's history, which perpetuates itself in the generational conflict of the family, is not resolved in favor of a positive attitude toward activism in the historical process; in *Divorce* the central motif of marriage/ divorce proves to be too "late" for change and, allegorically, the past determines the future of Israel.

We can detect the particular attitudes toward history in *Billiards* and *Divorce* in most of the other writings of the two authors. Both authors are engaged on a political as well as literary level, and yet express their moral and historical commitment in different ways. Heinrich Böll's writing, reveals an interest in recent German history as a determinant cause, but avoids the fictional depiction of its meaning with an overriding moral-religious tone. Yehoshua, in most of his fictional as well as essay writing, within the framework of his historical assumptions, exposes the many-sidedness of Israeli existence as a problematic integration between the idea, the people and the land.<sup>11</sup>

The particular form of the allegorical family novel as a construct foregrounding attitudes toward history needs further intertextual and theoretical examination. The recontextualization of the two novels which have been discussed suggests that family relations, and mainly the generational ones, may allegorically point at different attitudes in the historical process. The personal, psychological and temporal patterns of the realistic family novel are substituted by a mythical time dimension, reinforced by motifs of archetypal nature, and thus are transposed to a collective historical experience. This dominant principle of the text

11. In his essays as well, Yehoshua relates "madness" to living in the diaspora. The diaspora enable us to be noncommittal with respect to the question of the nation's survival. In the novel, the father, named Yehuda, personifies all the Jewish people caught between diaspora and homeland. Israel, the name of his son-in-law, alludes to the more biblical, but at the same time current national reality which is the healthier, although somehow not complete and distorted reality. A short polemic on this theme was expressed by the author (1968): "I think that the severest failing of Zionism is that we strived for normalization and we said normal! We progressed in having more of an army, occupying more territories, but is this moving toward the final aim of normalization? On the contrary, we inflamed the aspects of abnormality in the whole of Jewish existence." See also Yehoshua (1980).

draws attention to the overall problem of history as mediated in the frame of a fictional construction. Toward the end of *Divorce*, Yehuda expresses his predicament and that of his family in the frame of history as "all symbols" (p. 354)—an expression which, used extrinsically, might refer to the common compositional nature of both novels.

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